



Israel / CERD

Racial Discrimination concerns must be taken seriously by Israel

FIDH's member organisations participate in the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

Geneva, 26 February 2007 - The United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (the "Committee") reviewed Israel's compliance with the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) in Geneva on 22-23 February 2007. The ICERD, which was ratified by Israel in 1979, commits State Parties, to adopt all necessary measures to eliminate racial discrimination, and to prevent and combat racist policies and practices. Adalah, the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI), and B'Tselem – three prominent organisations based in Israel and members of FIDH– presented information to the Committee on the status of implementation of ICERD by the State of Israel.

Adalah – The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel - emphasized numerous discriminatory laws and state practices faced by Arab citizens, which violate Israel's obligations under the ICERD: institutionalised discrimination in land and housing policies, discrimination resulting from the granting of military service benefits, a harsh new criminal procedure law for detainees suspected of security offences, impunity in cases of excessive use of force by the police against Arab citizens, including the October 2000 killings; a law banning family unification with Palestinians from the Occupied Territories based solely on national origin, unequal state funding of Arab towns and villages and the lack of participation of Arab citizens in the planning process, displacement and dispossession of Arab Bedouin citizens from the unrecognised villages in the Naqab, discriminatory resources allocated to and limitations on access to education for Arab students, discrimination in state support for Arab cultural institutions, and the lack of recognition for Muslim holy sites in Israel, among others. Mr. Itzhak Levanon, Ambassador of Israel to the United Nations in Geneva, concluded the dialogue with the Committee by asserting that, "There is no racial discrimination in Israel." Ms. Sawsan Zaher, a lawyer with Adalah commented: "I am pleased that the Committee's Country Rapporteur for Israel responded that according to the thousands of pages that the Committee received from various sources, there are certainly structural issues of racial discrimination in Israel that must be addressed."¹ .

The Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI) – the oldest human rights organisation in Israel whose mandate covers human rights violations committed by the State of Israel both within and outside Israel - denounced severe and long-standing discrimination against the indigenous Arab Bedouin population of the Negev with respect to land and housing rights aimed at enabling Jewish citizens to settle in the Negev, discriminatory detention procedures for foreign nationals and the failure to enforce the law against criminal employers and thereby protect migrant workers' basic rights, as well as the policy of separation and segregation between Israelis and Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, particularly in Hebron, and the disproportionate security measures resulting in the total destruction of the Palestinians' fabric of life. Limor Yehuda, a lawyer with ACRI, urged the Committee "to take a clear stand that a policy of separation and segregation and actions and orders that deprive human rights and fundamental freedoms on the basis of a person's national or ethnic origin, are absolutely prohibited"².

¹ For more information, see Adalah's reports at: <http://www.adalah.org/eng/cerd.php>

² For more information, see ACRI's report on <http://www.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cerd/cerds69-ngos.htm>

B'Tselem – an Israeli NGO addressing human rights in the Occupied Territories – focused its presentation on the discriminatory roads regime in the West Bank and the issue of state controlled lands in the West Bank. It re-affirmed that Israel is responsible for the implementation of the Convention in all the territories under its effective control and should therefore report to the Committee on its conduct in the Occupied Territories, contrary to Israel's position. Israel's road regime restricts Palestinian travel along most major roadways in the West Bank, making them “roads for Israelis only”. Under this regime, the rights of every person in the West Bank are based on his or her national origin and on the premises that *all* Palestinians constitute a security risk. Another discriminatory practice used by Israel in the West Bank since 1979 is the declaration of land as “state-land” in order to take control of Palestinian lands and allocate them for the building of Israeli Jewish settlements. Yehezkel Lein, research Director of B'Tselem argued that “discrimination in the Occupied Territories is not only a result of military occupation but also the result of Jewish settlements”.³

The CERD Committee is expected to issue its concluding observations and recommendations to Israel in March 2007. FIDH and its member organizations will follow-up on their implementation by the Government of Israel.

For further information, see also :

19 May 2006 - Israeli High Court upholds discriminatory law against Palestinian spouses:
http://www.fidh.org/article.php3?id_article=2134

25 August 2004 - Discriminatory Citizenship Law denounced by the UN Committee on Racial Discrimination (CERD):
http://www.fidh.org/article.php3?id_article=1852

20 July 2004 - Discriminatory law to be extended:
http://www.fidh.org/article.php3?id_article=1617

14 August 2003 - “Family unification law” should be revoked, says the UN Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination following an FIDH and partners petition:
http://www.fidh.org/article.php3?id_article=360

31 July 2003 - Discriminatory law approved by the Knesset:
http://www.fidh.org/article.php3?id_article=228

22 April 2003 - Israeli Campaign Against the Bedouins in the Negev:
http://www.fidh.org/article.php3?id_article=363

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³ For more information, see B'Tselem's report at: <http://www.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cerd/cerds69-ngos.htm>